A FRAGMENT ON SHAKSPEARE,

EXTRACTED FROM

ADVICE TO A YOUNG POET,

By the Rev. MARTIN SHERLOCK.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

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PREFACE.

By the FRENCH TRANSLATOR *.

FOR ſome years paſt, the Engliſh literature has been eſteemed amongſt us; and the name of Shakſpeare, at firſt little known in France, is become more familiar to us. M. de Voltaire himſelf, by writing againſt him, has contributed, perhaps, without deſign, to extend his reputation. He has inflamed the curioſity of his readers, and he has excited in many a deſire of knowing a writer, who, notwithſtanding great faults, has captivated, for two centuries, a whole enlightenened nation. Some have read his works, and have mentioned them; others have mentioned them, without having read them. Diſſertations have been made on his beauties, and on his faults, and Shakſpeare has at length begun to engage part of the attention of thoſe who cultivate literature.

* The original is in Italian; and may be purchaſed at Meſſrs. Robinſons in Pater-noſter Row, or at Mr. Elmſly's in the Strand.

or them I publiſh this extract, perſuaded that ome new ideas on this celebrated poet muſt meet ith their gracious reception.

In peruſing the work from which I have taken his extract, I found ſome ſuch ſtriking proofs of he taſte and impartiality of the author, that I hink myſelf obliged to preſent them to the pub-ic. Theſe two talents are in a critic moſt eſſen-ial: they alone give weight and authority to his eciſions. The paſſages which I ſhall quote will ave the double advantage of intereſting the rea-er, and of acquainting him with the right which Mr. Sherlock may have to his confidence.

Mr. Sherlock ſays to his young Italian poet; " Dantè is a great genius, Arioſto is a delightful " and enchanting poet; but neither the one nor " the other can ſerve to form your taſte." As a recompence, he does not fail to recommend to him the ſtudy of the Greek, Latin, and French poets. Homer, Virgil, and Racine, are the models which he propoſes to him; Horace, Longinus, and Boi-leau, are the maſters from whom he would have him take leſſons.

" At the moment," ſays he, " of a war be-" tween England and France, my young reader " will, perhaps, be ſurprized at my making an " elogium on French literature. He is little ac-" quainted with the principles of my nation. An " Engliſhman dares always do juſtice to merit. " When his country requires his talents, he is

" ready to dedicate them to her without reſerve. " Does ſhe require his blood, he is ready to ſhed " it in her ſervice, to the laſt drop. But, at the " ſame time, he is incapable of doing injuſtice to " an enemy. We are not at war with the French " literature. The men of letters of all nations " ſhould be fellow-citizens. They ſhould live in an " eternal peace, and do juſtice to the merits both " of the living and the dead, of London, Paris, " Rome, and Athens."

With this profeſſion of impartiality Mr. Sherlock introduces his encomiums on Boileau and Racine. He thus ſpeaks of the latter.

" Racine, a diſciple of Boileau and of the " Greeks, does honour to Paris, and would have " been honoured at Athens. A good taſte, good " ſenſe, truth, a knowledge of the human heart, " the pathetic carried to the utmoſt height; theſe " are the merits which entitle him to a place be- " tween Sophocles and Euripides. The magic " pencil of Correggio, his ſtrength and his graces, " the tenderneſs and majeſty of Guido, the diſ- " poſition and deſign of Raphaël, are united in " this perfect model *. Perfection, if I may ſo " ſay, is his characteriſtic. And when, apprized " of the difficulty of making good French verſes,

* To perceive the whole force of this elogium, it is neceſſary to read, in Mr. Sherlock's ſixth letter on Dryden, the compariſon which he makes between Raphael and Correggio.

" of bending a ſtubborn language to ſweetneſs " and harmony, we think that Racine joins to ſo " many ſolid talents the charm of the fineſt " verſes that could poſſibly be written, we cannot " ſufficiently admire or praiſe him."

Hear him ſpeak of Longinus.

" This matchleſs writer at once gives the pre- " cept and example *. He read with enthuſiaſm, " he wrote with enthuſiaſm, and he conveys en- " thuſiaſm into the ſoul of his reader. Other cri- " tics will make you *ſee* the beauties of a poet: " he makes you *feel* them; he does not demon- " ſtrate, he does not perſuade, he entrances, he " elevates, and, like the ſublime which he paints, " he ſubdues the ſoul, and tranſports it whither " he pleaſes. Woe to the reader, who, while he reads " Longinus, can ſtop to judge him! But after- " wards, when in cool blood he analyſes his " ideas, he there diſcovers the refined and exqui- " ſite touch of Horace, the ſure and ſolid judg- " ment of Boileau, the vigour and ſenſibility of " the citizen of Geneva. Such are his leading " features. Some one has well entitled his book, " *The book of Gold.* It is the moſt valuable of all " the treatiſes that are in being. It has only one " fault, that of being too ſhort. Learn him there- " fore by heart, all ye Mæcenaſes and poets.—

* His own example ſtrengthens all his laws,
And is himſelf the great ſublime he draws. POPE.

" *Hic murus abeneus eſto!* Learn him alſo, ye who " endeavour to read with ſentiment and feeling, " and, if I may ſo ſay, with judgement. Ye ad- " mirers of Dantè and Arioſto, read him not. " Longinus, the Homer of critics, is all good " ſenſe; he will break your idols. A lover of " truth, and of bold but judicious ſallies, he ſuf- " fers not the ſtarts of a diſordered imagination. " But this great man, who would have condemn- " ed to the flames that

" *Monſtrum horrendum, informe, ingens,*

" the *Divina Comedia*, would have read ſome of " its verſes with tranſport. On peruſing the " canto of Count Ugolino *, the ſentimental ſoul " of Longinus would have exclaimed, 'Homer " has nothing ſo ſublime;' and his infallible " judgement would afterwards have confirmed the " decree. When I ſtyled Longinus a great man, " it was with reaſon. To ſuperior talents he ad- " ded an elevated heart. He was a man of learn- " ing, and at once poſſeſſed (what are very ſel- " dom united) genius and taſte. As a ſtateſman, " he maintained with a noble ſpirit the glory of " his queen. To the enlightened underſtanding " of a philoſopher he added the conſtancy of a " hero; and, if he had not compoſed his divine " treatiſe, his death alone would have immorta-

* This ſhocking but picturesque ſubject now ſpeaks to all nations in the univerſal language of Sir Joſhua Reynolds. *Engliſh Tranſlator.*

" lized

"lized him; a death as glorious to him as "it was infamous to Zenobia and Aurelian."

The following paſſage is a farther ſtriking proof of the taſte and impartiality of Mr. Sherlock:

"If I have not named the *great* Corneille, it is "not that I by any means deny his claim to that "title. I did not propoſe to diſcuſs the French "literature, but only to point out the models of "good taſte; and Corneille does not belong to "this claſs. The taſte muſt be formed before he "is read: but here you aſk me, 'muſt Shak-"ſpeare therefore be ſtudied as a model of good "taſte?' The queſtion is ſevere, and I will not "anſwer it—But, O Truth, thou art my only "idol. I ſacrifice on thy altar my darling poet, "and I anſwer, No."

The ſtyle of this little work will pleaſe ſome, and will diſpleaſe others. Such as it is, it is the author's, and not mine. I have not only conſidered it as my duty to tranſlate his thoughts with the utmoſt exactneſs; but I have carried my ſcruples ſo far as to preſerve, as far as the difference of languages would allow it, the arrangement of his words, the turn of his phraſe, and, if I may ſo expreſs it, the phyſiognomy of his ſtyle *. Thus, whatever opinion may be formed of it, I ought to have no ſhare either in the praiſes or in the cenſures. If the object reflected by a faith-

* The Engliſh tranſlator may ſtrictly ſay the ſame.

ful

ful mirrour appear beautiful, or if it appear deformed, the mirrour ought neither to be praiſed nor blamed. It does not make the object; it only ſhews it.

It was my firſt intention to have given a complete tranſlation of *Advice to a young poet.* I have ſince found, that the author has foreſtalled me by inſerting in his *Letters** ſeveral extracts from his Italian book. It would be an impoſition on the public to offer them as new what they already know. The digreſſion on Shakſpeare and the paſſages which I have juſt quoted are the only intereſting parts of this little work, which Mr. Sherlock has not introduced in his *Letters.*

* Volume II; of which an Engliſh tranſlation was printed, for the author, by Mr. Nichols.

A FRAG-

A

FRAGMENT*

ON

SHAKSPEARE.

. . . . . .

. . . . . Always therefore ſtudy Nature.

IT is ſhe who was thy book, O Shakſpeare; it is ſhe who was thy ſtudy day and night; it is ſhe from whom thou haſt drawn thoſe beauties which are at once the glory and delight of thy nation. Thou wert the eldeſt ſon, the darling child, of Nature; and, like thy mother, enchanting, aſtoniſhing, ſublime, graceful, thy variety is inexhauſtible. Always original, always new, thou art the only prodigy which Nature has produced. Homer was the firſt of men, but thou art more than man. The reader who thinks this elogium extravagant is a ſtranger to my ſubject. To ſay that Shakſpeare had the imagination of Dantę, and the depth of Machiavel, would be a

* The work from which it is taken is mentioned by Mr. Sherlock, in Letter xx, vol. I.

weak

weak encomium: he had them, and more. To ſay that he poſſeſſed the terrible graces of Michael Angelo, and the amiable graces of Correggio, would be a weak encomium: he had them, and more. To the brilliancy of Voltaire he added the ſtrength of Demoſthenes; and to the ſimplicity of La Fontaine, the majeſty of Virgil.—But, ſay you, we have never ſeen ſuch "a being." You are in the right; Nature made it, and broke the mould.

The merits of this poet are ſo extraordinary, that the man, who ſhould ſpeak of them with the moſt rigid truth, would ſeem to the higheſt degree extravagant. But what ſignifies what I *ſeem*, if really I *be* true? I will therefore ſay, becauſe a more certain truth was never ſaid; *Shakſpeare poſſeſſed, in the higheſt degree of perfection, all the moſt excellent talents of all the writers that I have ever known.*

"Horace," ſays Bacon, "is the moſt popular of all "the poets of antiquity, becauſe he contains moſt ob-"ſervations applicable to the buſineſs of human life." Shakſpeare contains more of them than Horace.

One of the chief merits of the Greek tragic poets (principally of Euripides) is, that they abound with morality. Shakſpeare has more morality than they.

Dramatic poetry is a picture made to be ſeen at a certain point of view. This point of ſight is the theatre. Moliere, who was an actor, had occaſion, when he was on the ſtage, to obſerve the effects produced during the repreſentation. This advantage is one of the reaſons of Moliere's being ſuperior in theatric effect to all the comic actors of his nation. Shakſpeare had the ſame advantage: he was alſo an actor; and in that

perſpective

perſpective of poetry (if I may be allowed the expreſſion) Shakſpeare is equal to Moliere.

Other poets have made men ſpeak by means of words: Shakſpeare alone has made ſilence ſpeak *. Othello, a man of a noble heart, but violent to an extreme, deceived by a villain, thinks that his wife, whom he adores, is unfaithful to him, and kills her. In ſuch a ſituation another poet would have made Othello ſay; *Good God! what a puniſhment! what miſeries are equal to mine!*—Shakſpeare petrifies his Othello; he becomes a ſtatue motionleſs and dumb.

Tacitus and Machiavel together could not have painted nor ſupported the character of a villain better than that of Iägo. . . . . .

. . . . . .

What is a poet, if he be ſtripped of his language and harmony? See then what Shakſpeare is, deprived of theſe advantages. (He is ſpeaking of two princes.) *They are ſoft as the Zephyrs which blow on the violet without moving its fragrant head; but, when their royal blood is kindled, they are furious as the ſtorm which ſeizes by the top the mountain pine, and makes it bend down to the valley.*

With other poets a ſimile is a principal beauty: in Shakſpeare the moſt beautiful ſimiles are frequently loſt in a croud of ſuperior beauties. I will explain myſelf. Whoever has obſerved Nature knows, that, when a man of courage is once provoked, he endeavours to

* Surely not alone, when we recollect the expreſſive ſilence of the ghoſt of Ajax in the Odyſſey, imitated by Virgil in his Dido; both which have been always juſtly admired. A diſſertation on the latter, by the earl of Corke, was printed in the paper called *The Old Maid*, 1755. *Engliſh Tranſlator.*

ſtrengthen

ſtrengthen his ideas by metaphors; he makes ſimilitude, without knowing it, and theſe ſimilitudes are always ſhort. The exceſſive ſenſibility of Coriolanus, his intrepidity, and his pride, are well known. After his return from Rome to Antium, Tullus, the general of the Volſcians, was jealous of him, accuſed him in the public ſquare before the aſſembly of the nobles, the people, and the ſoldiers, with having betrayed their intereſts by a boyiſh tenderneſs for his mother, by a weakneſs which had aſtoniſhed the whole army. Coriolanus exclaims,

"Hear'ſt thou, Mars?

"*Tullus*. Name not the God, thou boy * of tears †."

At this inſult the diſpute grows warm, and one of the nobles raiſing his voice, ſays,

"Peace both, and hear me ſpeak."

Then Coriolanus:

"Cut me to pieces, Volſcians, men and lads,
"Stain all your edges in me. Boy? falſe hound!
"If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
"That, like an eagle in a dove-coat, I
"Flutter'd your Volſcians in Corioli.
"Alone I did it—Boy?"——

* There are ſome critics who will condemn this expreſſion. They have forgotten that Homer, to convey a reproach, has uſed the feminine gender;

Αχαιδες ου τι Αχαιοι.

And Virgil, after Homer,

O veræ Phrygiæ neque enim Phryges.

Neither of theſe reproaches is ſo well founded as that of Tullus to Coriolanus.

† "Boy *of tears*" is a ſtrange expreſſion; *weeping* boy would have been a trifling one. I would rather have Shakſpeare ſeem ſtrange than groveling. *French Tranſlator.*

A more

A more juſt, a more noble, a more appoſite compariſon cannot be conceived. A lion amidſt heifers, a wolf among ſheep: this has been ſaid a thouſand times. An eagle among doves preſents a new image. But it is more than an eagle among doves; it is an eagle among doves, in a dove-houſe, where the diſturbance and the terror are far greater. But the beauty of the compariſon is loſt, as it were, among other ſuperior beauties. This image is here a characteriſtic ſtroke, it is a ſentiment, and a ſentiment which can only ſuit that particular moment. It is to the *valiant*, the *ſuſceptible*, the *proud* Coriolanus, that Tullus gives an affront, and an affront which touches him in the moſt delicate point, his military glory. His heart inflamed, his imagination fired, Coriolanus replies,

— — — "Boy? falſe hound!—you know,
"That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
"Flutter'd your Volſcians in Corioli *."

Coriolanus

* Mr. Sherlock quotes this compariſon among a thouſand others, which he might as well have choſen. The reaſons which he gives to convince us of its beauty ſeem to me extremely juſt; but I fear that they will not be ſufficiently clear to a ſuperficial reader, or a faſtidious fine gentleman. Let us endeavour to add ſome more.

What then is there here ſo admirable? Let me be told. How? Tullus reproaches Coriolanus with his weakneſs, and he diverts himſelf with ſpeaking of an eagle, and a dove-houſe. In the height of his rage, he makes a ſimilitude, which, beſides, is very common, to ſay no more, and has not even the weak merit of being brilliant. For my part, I maintain that the imagination of man can never go farther, nor nature be better repreſented, than in this paſſage of Shakſpeare. I maintain that the anſwer of the warrior is the only one which the poet ought to have put into his mouth. Reader, the only favour that I requeſt of you is, not to condemn me before you have heard me.

Coriolanus makes a compariſon without knowing it; nor does the reader, who alſo takes fire, perceive it any

No one knew ſo well as Shakſpeare the art of diſplaying a character. He poſſeſſes in the higheſt degree the merit of making men ſpeak, not as they ſpeak in general, but as each individual ought to ſpeak, agreeably to his genius and ſituation. Suppoſe then yourſelf to be Coriolanus, and then ſtudy what you would ſay in his place. An extreme ſenſibility was the lot of this hero. By that all the events of his life were determined. That put arms into his hand againſt his country; that alſo made him ſurrender them to his mother. This quick ſenſibility enkindled in his ſoul an ardent paſſion for military glory. Thus, to treat Coriolanus as a coward and a boy, was to him the moſt odious affront, an affront the more cruel, as nothing was more directly oppoſite to his character. What muſt be the effect of this affront? The raiſing, the exalting, the inflaming this magnanimous heart, making, as it were, his ſoul, ſwoln with rage, burſt through a body become too narrow to contain it. He is then tranſported beſide himſelf. Every thing becomes the object of his fury. Inſulted by Tullus, he inſults him in return, and not only him but his whole nation. "I a boy!" he exclaims. Firſt, obſerve this word. When two men grow warm in a diſpute, if ſome extravagant expreſſion eſcape from one of them, by which the other feels himſelf ſenſibly hurt, he will never fail inceſſantly to repeat it. To that he chiefly confines himſelf. The oftener he repeats it, the more he thinks he triumphs. Shakſpeare, the painter of nature, has not omitted this ſtroke of truth. In the few words that Coriolanus utters, he makes him three times repeat the expreſſion which has the moſt affronted him, "A boy!" And he concludes his diſcourſe with the ſame idea, on which his mind muſt naturally dwell, "Boy!" But to proceed.

"If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
"That, like an eagle, &c."

It would be impoſſible to find a more new, a more lively, a more original turn. As to the idea, it is very ſtriking: as if Marcius had ſaid, "In hiſtory, in your own hiſtory written by yourſelves, you have "been forced to conſign my glory, and your own diſgrace, to the "eyes of all nations and of all ages."

—"'Tis

any more than he. He only ſees one line of character, which completely diſcovers to him the whole Coriolanus,

— — — — — "'Tis there,
"That like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
"Flutter'd your Volſcians in Corioli."

This is the compariſon at which many readers will exclaim. Let us ſee then whether Shakſpeare be blameable.

Firſt, a compariſon here was neceſſary. When one of the populace is enraged, he diſcharges without heſitation a volly of metaphors and figures, at whoſe boldneſs a peaceable hearer is amazed. Anger enlarges the faculties of the mind, when ſhe allows the uſe of them. He will therefore unite all the powers of his ſoul, he will dart his thoughts with all the force of an irritated heart. He who has imagination expreſſes himſelf in metaphors, and rage always gives imagination. Inſtead of this vulgar man, now repreſent to yourſelf Coriolanus, ſuch as I have juſt deſcribed him, general of a numerous army, engroſſed by important affairs, in a critical and tranſporting moment, with a moſt impetuous ſoul, the moſt ardent blood, and an unbounded paſſion for glory. This Coriolanus, wounded to the quick in his moſt ſenſible part, in his honour, muſt either employ metaphors, or nature would be an inexplicable enigma.

Secondly, All the ideas of Shakſpeare are drawn from truth. This compariſon cannot be reproached with the common fault of not being juſt; it is founded on a paſſage in hiſtory. "The Romans having reſolved to beſiege Corioli, Marcius," ſays the tranſlator of Plutarch, "ruſhed up to the gate, and entered the town amongſt the "fugitives, without any one daring at firſt to turn round, or to ſtop "and make head againſt him." Looking round, and obſerving that he had entered with few followers, and ſeeing himſelf on all ſides ſurrounded with enemies, he then performed ſuch exploits as are incredible, breaking and overthrowing all on whom he ruſhed, ſo that he made ſome of them fly to the moſt retired parts of the city; others in affright ſurrendered, and threw their arms on the ground before him. The town being taken, the Conſul Cominius ſpoke as follows: "Let us decree, that Marcius ſhall for the future be ſur-"named Coriolanus, if the exploit that he has performed has not "given him this name already." After that he always bore it.—

lanus, and a ſublime ſentiment, which tranſports his ſoul.

If

Thus the compariſon of the poet is very exact. This prince appeared alone in the midſt of the affrighted Volſcians, like a bird of prey, who ſcatters terror among fearful birds. What farther art has he diſplayed, in having choſen a ſingular circumſtance in his life ſo glorious to him, ſo fatal to the vanquiſhed, ſo celebrated thoughout all the world? And what a pleaſure for provoked Coriolanus to be able to ſay, "I did all this in Corioli," as if the ſingle name of that town, recalling his own, which was derived from it, had ſtill more atteſted his valour.

Thirdly, Mr. Sherlock has well obſerved, that the image of an eagle in a dove-cote much exceeds in grandeur and novelty that of any other animal, of a lion for inſtance, who diffuſes terror among ſheep. This lion puts the flock to flight, but the effect which the eagle produces amidſt doves is of a ſtyle much more original. In fact it would be impoſſible to convey in our language (French) by a ſingle word all the ideas that are included in that emphatical expreſſion *Flutter'd*. This word not only marks the diſorder and alarm; it alſo paints the tumult of a flock of birds, whom a ſudden fright occaſions to take wing all at once, the trembling, the ſound, and, as it were, the vibration of their wings, when they begin to take flight. Then ſee how ſtriking is this contraſt! An eagle among doves, an eagle, the ſtrongeſt and moſt formidable bird, and doves, effeminate birds, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, who are always conſidered as a ſymbol of gentleneſs, and conſequently of fear. This is not all; Shakſpeare is not contented with making the eagle deſcend among the doves; he will alſo make him deſcend into the dove-houſe itſelf, according to the judicious remark of Mr. Sherlock; and this is the higheſt degree of terror. Heaped one upon another, ſhut up as in a priſon, which keeps them, in the preſence of a tyrant, preſſing, crowding each other on every ſide, endeavouring in vain to eſcape through paſſages that are too narrow, their perplexity, their miſery, is at the height. Laſtly, this word *colombier* may ſeem low in our language, but in Engliſh it is very beautiful and poetical. *Dove-cote* is uſed in a noble ſtyle, while *pigeon-houſe*, which gives the ſame idea, is reſerved for common language. Is it the fault of Shakſpeare, that the beauty of the term which he employs cannot be tranſlated into French?

One

If the Italian reader be not ſenſible of the ſublimity of this ſentiment, I will anſwer for his not being more ſenſible of the ſublimity of "Let him die for't," if he knew not the ſcene but by a proſe recital, and if only the preceding word were repeated to him: to perceive the ſublimity of both paſſages, we muſt be acquainted with the character of him who ſpeaks, we muſt know the ſituation of time in which he ſpeaks, and have previouſly read, if not the whole piece, at leaſt the ſcene.

The brilliant, the flowery, the light Voltaire has introduced a faſhion, as it were, of reading without attention. This magician has infuſed into our minds a moſt pernicious idleneſs; and a beauty, which is not ſuperficial, now paſſes unobſerved. One of the firſt lords of the city ſpeaks to Coriolanus. Coriolanus, tranſported with rage, does not hear him; this is *one* beauty: he makes a violent apoſtrophe to the ſoldiers;

One reflection more, and I have done. If any one ſhould think the oppoſition between the eagle and the doves exaggerated, this is my anſwer. When a man of great merit, and who is conſcious of his own deſerts, like Coriolanus, is reviled by an inferior, it is natural for him, inflamed by paſſion, to exalt himſelf above his real worth, and to degrade the other below his. There muſt always be two hyperboles at once.

Such are the principal beauties that have ſtruck me in this ſimilitude. Ah! what then would it be, if you were ſenſible of the force of every word, and of the harmony of the Engliſh verſification! A reader more acute, I make no doubt, may ſtill diſcover a multitude of new reſemblances. It is in vain to meditate on this profound and inconceivable genius;

C'eſt un champ qu'on ne peut tellement moiſſonner
Que les derniers venus n'y trouvent à glaner. *La Fontaine.*

Though ever ſo completely reap'd, this field
To the laſt comer will ſome gleanings yield. *French Tranſlator.*

this is *another* beauty: and with the ſame fierceneſs, the ſame fury, he makes, at the ſame inſtant, another apoſtrophe to Tullus: and theſe *three* beauties, founded in nature and in the particular character of Coriolanus, will never be perceived by thoſe who are accuſtomed to read ſuperficially.

Tacitus is the writer of antiquity who has drawn characters with the greateſt ſtrength, vivacity, and truth. Shakſpeare has drawn them better than Tacitus.

I have much ſtudied mathematics: I think I have preciſion in my ideas, and I would not have theſe words, "Shakſpeare poſſeſſes all the moſt excellent talents of all writers, *and more*," paſs for a frantic and poetical ſtart; they are true, literally true. In the hiſtory of the wars of the king of Pruſſia, we may diſcover all the reſources of Cæſar and Alexander, and an infinity of new reſources created by the aſtoniſhing genius of that monarch. In the poetry of Shakſpeare, we find all the ſources of poetical beauty that are known to all other poets, and an infinity of new ſources of which they were ignorant. In this point of view, Shakſpeare may be ſtyled the Frederick of poetry;

> The enemies of Shakſpeare ſhall ſay this,
> Then in a friend it is cold modeſty. *Jul. Cæſar.*

The beauties of this poet are never ſuperficial: they include a fund of truth, which augments their value in each peruſal, and in that he is ſuperior to all the world; but I will declaim no longer, I put it to the proof, I defy Greece, and let Truth triumph.

Let

Let us find a paſſage in which a juſt parallel may be made. Homer, the father of poetry, was alſo the father of eloquence. Eloquence was an object of the utmoſt importance in the Grecian education. Homer, often mentions this; and when Peleus entruſted Achilles to the tuition of Phœnix, the two only things which he recommended to him were, to make his ſon an eloquent man and a brave warrior*;

Μυθων τε ρητηρ' εμεναι, πρηκτηρα τε εργων.

It appears by the great number of ſpeeches which Homer has introduced into the Iliad, that he had a particular predilection for eloquence. Many of them are very beautiful. Thoſe in the ninth book are thought the beſt, and are really three maſter-pieces. The Grecian army put to flight by Hector, who had threatened to burn their fleet at ſun-ſet, had no hopes remaining but from the return of Achilles. The object was of no ſmall importance. The taking of Troy was no longer the only point in queſtion, but the preſervation of their fleet, of their lives, and of their glory, of the glory of the Greeks, who were greedy of glory alone. Agamemnon was very ſenſible of their ſituation, and with the greateſt diſcernment he choſe as ambaſſadors, Ajax, a blunt and brave warrior, to addreſs a warrior, Phœnix, who had educated him, and who knew every fibre of his heart; and Ulyſſes, the profound, the craſty Ulyſſes, the ableſt in all the Grecian camp, to deceive him by eloquence. The ambaſſadors are in the tent of Achilles. Go and read their ſpeeches, and afterwards impartially compare them with what I am going to mention.

* He bade me teach thee all the ways of war;
To ſhine in councils, and in camps to dare.

Plutarch ſays, that, after the murder of Julius Cæſar, Brutus made an harangue to calm the people; and that afterwards Antony made another; of which the conſequence was, that the people, enraged, ſet fire to the houſes of the conſpirators, and would have maſſacred them if they had not fled. Shakſpeare brings the Roman Roſtra on the ſtage. Brutus aſcends, and ſets forth the reaſons which determined him to kill Cæſar. He ſays, that he was deſirous to reſtore to his country that freedom of which Cæſar had deprived her; that he loved Cæſar much, but that he loved Rome more. "As Cæſar," ſays he, "loved me, I weep for him; as he was valiant, I "honour him; but as he was ambitious, I ſlew him." He thus cloſes his ſpeech: "With this I depart, that, as "I ſlew my beſt lover for the good of Rome, I have "the ſame dagger for myſelf, when it ſhall pleaſe my "country to need my death." The people, who had the higheſt opinion of the probity of Brutus, are thoroughly perſuaded of the juſtice of the death of Cæſar, exclaim that "Cæſar was a tyrant," would make Brutus dictator in his room, and prepare to "bring "him to his houſe with ſhouts and clamours." Brutus entreats them to ſtay and hear Antony, who enters at that inſtant with the body of Cæſar.

Brutus departs, Antony goes up into the chair to harangue the people, who were in that diſpoſition of mind which I have juſt deſcribed. He ſpeaks as follows:

Ant. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Cæſar, not to praiſe him.
The evil, that men do, lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Cæſar! The noble Brutus

Hath

Hath told you, Cæſar was ambitious:
If it were ſo, it was a grievous fault;
And grievouſly hath Cæſar anſwer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus, and the reſt,
(For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honourable men)
Come I to ſpeak in Cæſar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and juſt to me:
But Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whoſe ranſoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Cæſar ſeem ambitious?
When that the poor have cry'd, Cæſar hath wept:
Ambition ſhould be made of ſterner ſtuff:
Yet Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did ſee, that, on the Lupercal,
I thrice preſented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuſe. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus ſays, he was ambitious;
And, ſure, he is an honourable man.
I ſpeak not to diſprove what Brutus ſpoke,
But here I am to ſpeak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cauſe;
What cauſe with-holds you then to mourn for him?—
O judgment, thou art fled to brutiſh beaſts,
And men have loſt their reaſon!—Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæſar,
And I muſt pauſe 'till it come back to me.

1 *Pleb.* Methinks, there is much reaſon in his ſayings.

2 *Pleb.* If thou conſider rightly of the matter,
Cæſar has had great wrong.

3 *Pleb.* Has he, maſters?
I fear, there will a worſe come in his place.

4 *Pleb.* Mark'd ye his words? He would not take the crown;
Therefore, 'tis certain, he was not ambitious.

1 *Pleb.* If it be found ſo, ſome will dear abide it.

2 *Pleb.* Poor ſoul! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

3 *Pleb.* There's not a nobler man in Rome, than Antony.

4 *Pleb.* Now mark him, he begins again to ſpeak.

Ant. But yeſterday the word of Cæſar might
Have ſtood againſt the world: now lies he there,
And none ſo poor to do him reverence.
O maſters! if I were diſpos'd to ſtir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I ſhould do Brutus wrong, and Caſſius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honourable men:
I will not do them wrong; I rather chooſe
To wrong the dead, to wrong myſelf, and you,
Than I will wrong ſuch honourable men.
But here's a parchment, with the ſeal of Cæſar,
I found it in his cloſet, 'tis his will:
Let but the commons hear this teſtament,
(Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read)
And they would go and kiſs dead Cæſar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his ſacred blood;
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it, as a rich legacy,
Unto their iſſue.

4 *Pleb.* We'll hear the will: Read it, Mark Antony.

All. The will, the will; we will hear Cæſar's will.

Ant. Have patience, gentle friends, I muſt not read it;
It is not meet you know how Cæſar lov'd you.
You are not wood, you are not ſtones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Cæſar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
For if you ſhould, O, what would come of it!

4 *Pleb.* Read the will; we will hear it, Antony;
You ſhall read us the will; Cæſar's will.

Ant. Will you be patient? Will you ſtay a while?
I have o'er-ſhot myſelf, to tell you of it.
I fear, I wrong the honourable men,
Whoſe daggers have ſtabb'd Cæſar: I do fear it.

4 *Pleb.* They were traitors: Honourable men!

All. The will! the teſtament!

2 *Pleb.* They were villains, murderers: The will! read the will!

Ant. You will compel me then to read the will?—
Then make a ring about the corpſe of Cæſar,

And

And let me ſhew you him that made the will.
Shall I deſcend? And will you give me leave?

All. Come down.

2 *Pleb.* Deſcend. [*He comes down from the pulpit.*

3 *Pleb.* You ſhall have leave.

4 *Pleb.* A ring; ſtand round.

1 *Pleb.* Stand from the hearſe, ſtand from the body.

2 *Pleb.* Room for Antony;—moſt noble Antony.

Ant. Nay, preſs not ſo upon me; ſtand far off.

All. Stand back! room! bear back!

Ant. If you have tears, prepare to ſhed them now.
You all do know this mantle: I remember
The firſt time ever Cæſar put it on;
'Twas on a ſummer's evening, in his tent;
That day he overcame the Nervii:—
Look! in this place, ran Caſſius' dagger through:
See, what a rent the envious Caſca made:
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus ſtabb'd;
And, as he pluck'd his curſed ſteel away,
Mark how the blood of Cæſar follow'd it;
As ruſhing out of doors, to be reſolv'd
If Brutus ſo unkindly knock'd, or no;
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæſar's angel:
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Cæſar lov'd him!
This was the moſt unkindeſt cut of all:
For when the noble Cæſar ſaw him ſtab,
Ingratitude, more ſtrong than traitors' arms,
Quite vanquiſh'd him: then burſt his mighty heart;
And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the baſe of Pompey's ſtatue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Cæſar fell.
O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
Whilſt bloody treaſon flouriſh'd over us.
O, now you weep; and, I perceive, you feel
The dint of pity: theſe are gracious drops.
Kind ſouls, what, weep you, when you but behold
Our Cæſar's veſture wounded? Look you here!
Here is himſelf, marr'd, as you ſee, with traitors.

1 *Pleb.* O piteous ſpectacle!

2 *Pleb.* O noble Cæſar!

3 *Pleb.* O woeful day!

4 *Pleb.* O traitors, villains!

1 *Pleb.* O moſt bloody ſight!

2 *Pleb.* We will be reveng'd: Revenge: About,—ſeek,—burn,—Fire,—kill,—ſlay.—let not a traytor live.

Ant. Stay, countrymen.

1 *Pleb.* Peace there:—hear the noble Antony.

2 *Pleb.* We'll hear him, we'll follow him, we'll die with him.

Ant. Good friends, ſweet friends, let me not ſtir you up
To ſuch a ſudden flood of mutiny.
They, that have done this deed, are honourable;
What privaie griefs they have, alas, I know not,
That made them do it; they are wiſe, and honourable,
And will, no doubt, with reaſons anſwer you.
I come not, friends, to ſteal away your hearts;
I am no orator, as Brutus is:
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend; and that they know full well
That gave me publick leave to ſpeak of him,
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of ſpeech,
To ſtir men's blood: I only ſpeak right on;
I tell you that, which you yourſelves do know;
Shew you ſweet Cæſar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths!
And bid them ſpeak for me: But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your ſpirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Cæſar, that ſhould move
The ſtones of Rome to riſe and mutiny.

All. We'll mutiny.

1 *Pleb.* We'll burn the houſe of Brutus.

3 *Pleb.* Away then, come ſeek the conſpirators.

Ant. Yet hear me, countrymen; yet hear me ſpeak.

All. Peace, ho! Hear Antony, moſt noble Antony.

Ant. Why, friends, know you go to do you not what:
Wherein hath Cæſar thus deſerv'd your loves?
Alas, you know not:—I muſt tell you then:—
You have forgot the will I told you of.

All. Moſt true;—the will;—let's ſtay, and hear the will.

Ant. Here is the will, and under Cæſar's ſeal.
To every Roman citizen he gives

To every ſeveral man, ſeventy-five drachmas.
2 *Pleb.* Moſt noble Cæſar!—We'll revenge his death.
3 *Pleb.* O royal Cæſar!
Ant. Hear me with patience.
All. Peace, ho!
Ant. Moreover he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
On this ſide Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs for ever; common pleaſures,
To walk abroad, and recreate yourſelves.
Here was a Cæſar: When comes ſuch another?
1 *Pleb.* Never, never —Come, away, away:
We'll burn his body in the holy place,
And with the brands fire the traitors' houſes.
Take up the body,
2 *Pleb.* Go, fetch fire.
3 *Pleb.* Pluck down benches.
4 *Pleb.* Pluck down forms, windows, any thing.
[*Exeunt Plebeians with the body* *.

Such is Shakſpeare in the veil of my barbarous proſe †: but he is beautiful even veiled; naked, he is beauty itſelf.

I do not oppoſe this ſpeech to any one of the three ſpeeches in Homer, but to all three together. Now chuſe that ſpeech in Virgil which pleaſes you beſt: but when I mentioned the maſter-pieces of Homer, I meant to include all the moſt beautiful paſſages that the Greek and Latin poetry can produce.

I have ſaid, that Shakſpeare equals all writers in the part in which each of them excells. Demoſthenes and Cicero were orators by profeſſion. Is there any one of their orations ſuperior to this? You anſwer,

* The French tranſlator has adopted in this ſcene the tranſlation of M. de Tourneur, making one or two alterations for the better.

† The reader muſt remember that the original was written in Italian.

that

that "there is." I aſk, which it is, and how often you have read it?—"Two hundred times."——And mine, how often?——"Once only."—Young reader, I do not accuſe you of judging raſhly. I do not aſk you to tranſlate your favourite oration into Italian proſe as bad as mine, nor to read my diſcourſe two hundred times (which ſtrict juſtice, however, would ſeem to require); I aſk you only to read it once more, and to read it with attention.

You have then read it again, and you ſtill prefer ſome Greek or Latin oration. Excuſe me, if I venture to inſinuate that you are not yet apprized of all the beauties of the ſpeech of Antony. What think you for inſtance, of theſe words,

— — — "which (Pompey's ſtatue)
"All the while ran with blood."

"It is a ſilly conceit," ſay you; "how could the mar-"ble which we ſee in the Spada palace run with "blood? It is a manifeſt abſurdity." Mighty well, this is one of the fineſt paſſages in the ſpeech. And firſt, it is not Shakſpeare who ſays theſe words; it is Antony who ſpeaks. He does not ſpeak to you, bright ſpirit, profound logician; he ſpeaks to the Roman people. Beſides, the circumſtance is mentioned in all hiſtories, and had without doubt ſome foundation. Rome was then engaged with a thouſand ideas of various prodigies occaſioned by the death of Cæſar. It is poſſible, that, to increaſe the number of them, Antony might invent this fable. But what appears to me more probable is, that ſome puſillanimous ſenator, who was not one of the conſpirators, terrified by the tumult,

tumult, might have ſeen ſome of the blood of Cæſar which had ſpirted on the ſtatue; he comes home much affrighted, and ſays that the ſtatue ran with blood; his family believe him, they ſpread the report, and Antony avails himſelf of it to ſhew how much the Gods are intereſted for Cæſar. Suppoſe what you will, it was an argument *ad ſuperſtitionem*, addreſſed to the moſt ſuperſtitious people in the world.

But to what good purpoſe,

" Ev'n at the baſe of Pompey's ſtatue?"

This is a ſly ſtroke. Pompey had been openly the friend of the Senate, and Cæſar the declared friend of the people. Cæſar had always ſupported the cauſe of the people againſt the Senate, and againſt Pompey. Thus theſe very artful words at once recalled to their memory all the oppreſſions which they had ſuffered, and all the kindneſs of Cæſar towards them; they ſaid, " Cæſar, your protector, your conſtant and faithful " friend, is fallen at the feet of his and your moſt cruel " enemy."

" 'Twas on a ſummer's evening,—
" That day he overcame the Nervii;"

What think you of this circumſtance? " There is no- " thing abſurd in it," you ſay; " but it is trifling and " uſeleſs." There is nothing uſeleſs in this ſpeech; but this word is one of the moſt eloquent that Antony has ſpoken. The Nervii had been ſome of the moſt formidable enemies of Rome, and they had never been conquered till that day. The aſſembly which Antony harangued was entirely compoſed of citizens and of the veterans of Cæſar. To the citizens theſe words

ſaid,

ſaid, "See that Cæſar who has delivered you from "your fears, who has given ſafety to your wives and "children, and to yourſelves the free enjoyment of "pleaſures and repoſe!" Theſe words ſaid to the ſoldiers: "See, maſſacred by traitors, that Cæſar, who "conducted you to glory; ſee that Cæſar under whom "you gathered all your laurels!"

Every line of this ſpeech deſerves an elogium; and, when you have examined it attentively, you will allow it, and will ſay with me, that neither Demoſthenes, nor Cicero, nor their glorious rival, the immortal Chatham, ever made a better.

You have obſerved the addreſs with which Antony gives his hearers time to be mutually inflamed by the words which they addreſs to one another. But poſſibly you may not have attended to the ſuperior art with which Shakſpeare has drawn the Roman people.

In general, the people are every where the people; but every people have alſo their own particular character; and thoſe of London, of Paris, and of Rome, have each a very different character. Thoſe who have not ſeen Rome cannot imagine with what truth the people are drawn in this ſpeech, and drawn ſuch as we ſee them at this day. The ſame paſſion, the ſame violence in their emotions, the ſame readineſs to be inflamed, the ſame diſpoſition to do every thing by the impulſe of a moment, and nothing by reaſon; theſe are the diſtinctive qualities of the people of Rome; and the words of Shakſpeare, "burn, fire, kill, ſlay;" are the lines of the character of the *Tranſteverins* *,

* This is the appellation at Rome of thoſe who inhabit the quarter which is ſituated beyond the Tyber. They are famous throughout Italy for their wickedneſs. *French Tranſlator.*

ſuch as it ſtill appears at the moment of my writing *.

I ſhould not have ſaid ſo much upon Shakſpeare, if from Paris to Berlin, and from Berlin to Naples, I had not heard his name profaned. The words *monſtrous farces* and *grave-diggers* † have been repeated to me in every town; and for a long time I could not conceive why every one uttered preciſely theſe two words, and not a third. One day happening to open a volume of Voltaire, the myſtery diſappeared; the two words in queſtion were found in that volume, and all the critics had learned them by heart. Voltaire is no leſs celebrated for the extent and variety of talents, than for his diſhoneſty, and for his practice of firſt pillaging, and afterwards calumniating all the living and the dead. Read Zara and Othello, and judge whether what I ſay be not true with regard to Shakſpeare. If Voltaire has much reviled this poet, he had ſtrong reaſons. The highwayman who robs has ſtrong reaſons afterwards to murder. Voltaire poſſeſſed the talents of murdering gracefully, and he well knew that a joke has more effect than twenty demonſtrations. But if he has ſaid ſome pretty things againſt our poet, he has alſo ſaid ſome in his favour. Take one which he once ſaid to me. On my obſerving, That foreign nations do not reliſh our Shakſpeare; "that," replied he, "is true, "but they only know him by tranſlations. Slight "faults remain, great beauties vaniſh, and a man "born blind cannot perſuade himſelf that a roſe is

* Shakſpeare was never at Rome. How came he then ſo well acquainted with the manners of the people? *Engliſh Tranſlator.*

† *Monſtruoſités et foſſoyeurs.*

" beautiful when the thorns prick his fingers." A charming expreſſion, and worthy of its author.

Foreigners, who are unacquainted with Shakſpeare, are fond of comparing him to Racine. Racine wrote tragedies, and Shakſpeare never wrote a tragedy. They cannot therefore be compared on that head; but I will not compare them in any thing; for I am a ſincere admirer of Racine, and I will not injure him.

It cannot be ſaid that I have been niggardly of my praiſes of the Greeks. They have invented much; but they have not invented every thing. The teleſcope, gun-powder, and the art of printing, are the inventions of modern times. Theſpis invented one ſpecies of poetry; Æſchylus made ſome progreſs in it; Euripides and Sophocles brought it to perfection. Racine followed theſe models at leaſt *paſſibus æquis*. But Shakſpeare, impatient of the curb, and diſdaining imitation, opened to himſelf a new road, leaped over it under the wing of genius, and created a ſpecies quite new. Jonſon, his contemporary, obſerved the unities; Shakſpeare would not obſerve them; he ſaid to Jonſon, " You place your ſcene at Rome; and the " ſpectator, who knows that he is at London, muſt " make an effort of imagination to believe himſelf at " Rome." Let him make two efforts of imagination " for me. Let him ſuppoſe himſelf at Rome, when " the curtain riſes in the firſt act; and when it " riſes in the fifth, let him ſuppoſe himſelf at Phi- " lippi. What will be the conſequence of it? You " will make a tragedy full of frigid declamations, " which will contain ſome diſguſting improbabilities,

"by crowding together ſome events which could "never happen in twenty-four hours; and this tra- "gedy, being deſtitute of action, will be oppoſite "to the fundamental idea of theatrical repreſentation, "which ought to ſhew an action (Δραμα) in dia- "logue. I will ſacrifice the unities, to which one can- "not ſubmit but at the expence of action; and to be "exact in ſome points, I will not be abſurd in a thou- "ſand. Make then," added he, "tragedies; I will "never make a tragedy. I will compoſe ſome dra- "matic pieces which will intereſt all claſſes of man- "kind as long as mankind ſhall exiſt." Such was the idea of Shakſpeare, and on this idea he muſt be judged. But the *Monſtrous Farces* and the *Grave-diggers?* The only view of Shakſpeare was to make his fortune, and for that it was neceſſary to fill the play-houſe. At the ſame time that he cauſed a dutcheſs to enter the boxes, he would cauſe her ſervants to enter the pit. The people have always money; to make them ſpend it, they muſt be diverted; and Shakſpeare forced his ſublime genius to ſtoop to the groſs taſte of the popu- lace, as Sylla jeſted with his ſoldiers. Who is the glory and the honour of France? There is only one voice; Moliere. Let us ſee whether theſe two authors have met exactly at the ſame point, and for the ſame reaſon. It is a fact known to all Paris, that the maſ- ter-piece of the French ſtage, the Miſantrope, failed at the firſt repreſentation; that, in order to raiſe it, and afterwards to ſupport it, Moliere made the *Tricks of Scapin*; and that, in order to make ſeven or eight ex- cellent comedies ſucceed, he was obliged to compoſe as many farces.

Such is literally the hiſtory of Shakſpeare, with this difference, that the buffooneries which Moliere annexed to his pieces Shakſpeare interwove into his. It was a happy circumſtance for the French poet, that two pieces were acted on the ſame day. It gave him an occaſion of ſaying trifling things with impunity; an occaſion of which Shakſpeare was deprived, as in his time one piece only was exhibited. The little pieces of Moliere took up in acting an hour and a half. Thoſe of Shakſpeare in general did not laſt above fifteen minutes; this moſt frequently was no more than two very ſhort ſcenes, and that *Monſtrous farce* of the *Grave-diggers* is a ſingle ſcene, written in the low manner of Moliere to divert the people; and for this ſingle ſcene, which takes up eight minutes in the repreſentation, the enlightened critics of this age have condemned ten volumes of the plays * of Shakſpeare.

Artiſts are every where the ſame. What Shakſpeare did at London, and Moliere at Paris, Raphael has done at Rome, and he has done it in his maſterpiece, in the maſter-piece of painting, his Transfiguration. The two Dominicans on their knees are as ſhocking a violation of good-ſenſe, and of the unities of place, of time, and of action, as it is poſſible to imagine. But we muſt not by any means ſuppoſe that Raphael was not more ſenſible of the abſurdity than we are. His maſter would have it ſo, and he was obliged to pleaſe him. Inſtead of ſaying, Raphael wanted taſte; let us ſay, Raphael wanted to be a car-

* In the French it is "*poeſies.*"

dinal.

dinal. The master of Shakspeare and Moliere was the people, a foolish and fantastic monster: to satisfy it, these writers were obliged to lay aside their own genius, and to assume the genius of the pit. There never existed three men who had more taste than Raphael, Moliere, and Shakspeare. All three have erred against good taste. But let us not therefore say, that they were unacquainted with it; let us rather say, that they sacrificed it to the desire of making their fortunes.

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